

**New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies**  
**Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials**  
**for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies**



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## Introduction

The Ethics and Religious Studies curriculum contributes a lot to students in terms of their social, thinking, moral and spiritual development. In their lifetime, students are exposed to challenges brought by religious and moral issues, including the origins and purpose of life, identity, sex and marriage, suffering and the life after death. The senior secondary Ethics and Religious Studies curriculum is composed of “Religious Traditions”, “Ethics” and “Faith in Action”. It aims to help students to think of religious and ethics issues through the enquiry learning process. It enables students to reflect critically on their daily life experience, build up their understanding and confidence in religions and to protect their own religious stance.

Ethics aims to enhance students’ analytical power in the face of religious and ethics issues and to encourage them to investigate and reflect these issues in human history and across the globe. The main focus is to investigate how values form and how to make judgements based on logical thinking. With the investigation of some personal and social issues, it helps students develop a set of ethical values which serves as a basis for making moral judgement and choices.

Schools have accumulated abundant experience in teaching topics on religious traditions in junior secondary. The Curriculum Development Institute develops the *Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies* in order to provide support to teachers and an opportunity to junior students to understand the content, learning points and learning methods of ethics. It gives them a more comprehensive understanding of the Ethics and Religious Studies in senior secondary.

Students often face various contradictory views and values. These arouse their suspicions about the meaning and values of life, , right or wrong and the origin of ethics. Acquiring knowledge on ethics and grasping the skills of moral reasoning help them investigate human issues. Although students may not study Ethics and Religious Studies in senior forms, it is beneficial to their growth if they can touch upon ethics in junior forms.

# New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies

## Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials

### for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies

#### Lesson One

## What is Ethics about?



### Introduction



Every day, when we read the newspaper, watch news on the TV, or even chat with our classmates, we would inevitably make judgments regarding certain people or issues.

“If I were the parents of the unfilial son, I wouldn’t have asked for leniency on his behalf!”

“Good! These parallel goods importers deserve heavy punishment.”

“Isn’t it too cruel to confiscate the personal belongings of these street sleepers?”

Your views may sometimes be the same as your family’s and classmates’, but sometimes your opinions differ. Why?



Think about it

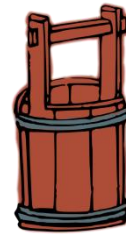
Consider the following scenarios – who do you think deserves praising?



A house is on fire. Passer-by A takes a bucket of water to help put out the fire, and Passer-by B throws some rubbish into the blaze. Assuming that the actions of the two persons have no impact on the intensity of the fire, who deserves our praise? Passer-by A or Passer-by B? Why?

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Do you agree to this saying?

“Life is short! Why work so hard? It’s important to have fun!”

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### Values affect judgement

Given differences in age, gender, cultural background, and childhood experience, individuals form different sets of values. These differences in values cause individuals to form different judgements on the same issue. Referring to the above two discussion questions, are your answers the same as those of your teachers and classmates? What is the reason behind the differences, if any?

### What are ethical issues?



Ethical issues refer to moral judgements made with regard to humans or human behaviour.

‘Judgement’ refers to assessment of persons or issues, involving not only statements of objective facts but also personal opinions of the individuals who make the

judgement. Judgements naturally involve value choices. Values can be relatively objective, e.g. this is an affordable and practical vehicle. Or, they may involve projection of subjective emotions, e.g. this music piece is graceful and moving.

People who can make moral judgements must be individuals who are capable of independent and self-directed thinking. They must be able to make independent and self-directed judgements on persons or issues based on their personal values, without being threatened by any pressure or tempted by any benefit.



# Let's judge



To make a moral judgement means to determine whether a certain person or a certain action is ethical or unethical. For example:

## Lying

Imagine the following scenarios:

- I. One day in 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the following happened: a student of the anti-Japanese movement was injured and on the run. He was hiding in your home, The Japanese troops and the army captain were knocking your door, and you were terrified. You knew that if you told the truth, the student would be caught and put to death; but if you lied and was found out, your family would be in danger.  
“Hello, Mister,” said the captain. “Have you seen an injured student?”  
Would you lie to the Japanese captain that the student was not in your home?
- II. One day in 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the following happened: a Japanese soldier asked you the whereabouts of your friend, Ms. Chan. Chan was a member of the underground anti-Japanese movement, and you believed that this soldier was to capture and kill her. You knew that Chan was hiding out in Wanchai, and to keep her alive, you lied to the soldier that Chan was hiding out in Fanling. You did not know that Chan had changed her plans and was in fact hiding out in Fanling. Because of your lie, Chan was caught and executed.  
Are you unethical by telling the lie?

'Lying is wrong. One should not lie., Lying is a bad thing....' All these statements categorise lying as 'unethical'. 'Honesty is a virtue, the desired way, and is right...'. All these statements categorise honesty, or telling the truth as 'ethical'.

Moral judgements involve two basic sets of descriptive words – one set includes unethical, shouldn't, wrong, incorrect, evil, bad, harmful; the other includes ethical, should, right, correct, virtuous, good, beneficial.

Ethical	Unethical
Should	Shouldn't
Right	Wrong
Correct	Incorrect
Virtuous	Evil
Good	Bad
Beneficial	Harmful

In Ethics, we first study the lifestyle, social systems, values and customs of a specific group, then attempt to investigate the causes, underlying principles and beliefs reflected from particular phenomena.



### Learning ethics would help you to:

- gain basic understanding of the theories of ethics;
- apply various ethical theories to make judgements and analyse important personal and social ethical issues, for example: euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and human rights issues;
- take an open-minded, consistent and tolerant attitude towards ethics-related issues;
- develop critical thinking skills so as to discuss various ethical issues, and make reasonable and responsible moral decisions;
- understand the beliefs and actions of others empathetically, and conduct objective discussions with persons who have different beliefs and values;
- affirm and respect the needs, feelings and expectations of others, and learn to respect and tolerate the views of others.



# Do you know?

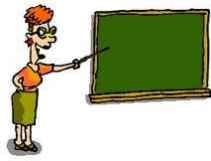
Shocking facts..... Is our world sick?



- Global military expenditure each year is sufficient to fulfil the basic nutrition and healthcare needs of the entire human race for 82 years.
- The money that Americans spent on alcohol each year is enough to fulfil the basic nutrition and healthcare needs of the entire human race for 8 years.
- The expenditure needed to provide basic education for the entire human race is equal to the turnover of the first half of 2011 of LVMH - the company that owns the LV brand.
- In the US, the wealth owned by the richest 1% population is greater than the sum of that owned by the bottom 90% families. The richest 1% of the world population has control of 40% of the world's total wealth.
- Yesterday, about 25,000 people died from hunger, including 16,000 children.
- Yesterday, 5,000 couples in China divorced, making a total 1.82 million divorced couples a year. Yesterday, about 54 couples divorced in Hong Kong, making a total 20,000 divorced couples a year. This figure is 10 times more than that of 1981. Now, 3 out of 10 couples would end up divorcing.
- Yesterday, 130,000 people had abortions; every year the world saw 50 million people having abortions, 100 million every 2 years.
- The way of life of human is one of the factors contributing to global warming. The average global temperature will raise 3 to 9 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. During this period, extreme weather conditions will be increasingly frequent, with more natural disasters, more instances of heavy rain, storms, droughts, melting glacier, rising sea levels, sudden changes in climate patterns and the spreading of infectious diseases becomes more serious.

- Cases of family violence increased drastically. From 2004 to 2011, cases of child abuse in Hong Kong rose by 41%, and the percentage of child abuse involving sexual assault also rose from 30% to 35%. Cases of spousal abuse in 2011 reached 3,174, averaging almost 9 cases per day.
- In Hong Kong, the number drug abusers aged under 21 stood at 3,430 in 2008, being 33.0% higher than that in 2006 (2,578).
- According to statistics, one out of average 10 persons in Hong Kong suffers from some forms of mental illness.
- The poverty disparity in Hong Kong is the most severe among developed regions. In the past two decades, low income households and households in poverty rose from 790,000 in 1991 to 1,150,000 in 2011. Poverty rate rose from 14.5% in 1991 to 17.9% in 2010.

Learning Ethics enables us to judge the above personal, social and global issues rationally.



## Reference materials for Teachers

### (Lesson One)

Training students to use concepts such as ‘intrinsic values’, ‘resulting consequences’, ‘expression of human virtue’ as basis for describing moral judgement This helps lay the foundation for learning about deontology, teleology, and theory of values.

#### **Think about it: Who deserves praising?**

A house is on fire. Passer-by A takes a bucket of water to help put out the fire, while Passer-by B throws rubbish into the blaze. Assuming that the actions of the two persons have no impact on the intensity of the fire, who deserves our praise? Passer-by A or Passer-by B? Why?

Passer-by A deserves our praise. Although he cannot put out the fire, he displayed the virtues of humanity. (expression of human virtue/good intention)

Although they had different intentions, their actions resulted in the same consequence – no impact on the fire. This is why the judgement is the same, and there is no difference between good or bad, virtuous or evil. (resulting consequences/ resulting benefits and drawbacks)

#### **Do you agree to this saying?**

“Life is short! Why work so hard? It’s important to have fun!”

Of course, I agree. Life is short, and what is the purpose of all the work if not for having fun? If I can enjoy life, I should do so and bring the greatest happiness to my life. (resulting consequences)

I object. Happiness is important, but the way to be happy is not only through play and fun. There are many other means to happiness in life, and there are also various goals in life, for example knowledge, friendship and aesthetic. (intrinsic values)

## Let's judge

To make a moral judgement means to determine whether a certain person or a certain action is ethical or unethical. For example: **Lying**

Imagine the following scenarios:

- I. On day in 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the following happened: a student of the anti-Japanese movement was injured and on the run. He was now taking refuge in your home, hiding from Japanese troops who were searching for him. A Japanese army captain and his team knocked on your door, and you were terrified. You knew that if you tell the truth, then the student would be caught and be put to death; but if you lied and was found out, your family would be in danger.  
“Hello, Mister,” said the captain. “Have you seen an injured student?”  
Would you lie and tell the Japanese captain that the student was not in your home?

The reasons why I lie:

The student from the anti-Japanese movement hid in my house only because he trusted me. If I testified against him, I would be betraying his trust and my nation. This was why I would lie to protect him. (the expression of human virtue/good intention)

The Japanese troops were my enemy. As a Chinese, my nation has moral priority, and this was why I should protect the anti-Japanese student. This was my duty as a Chinese. (intrinsic value)

The reasons why I do not lie:

Japanese troops would very possibly search the house for the student. If I lied and was found out, I might bring trouble to myself. Also, I did not know who the student was. There was no reason to risk my life. If he joined the anti-Japanese movement, then he must have been prepared to sacrifice himself. The result would be the same with or without my testimony. On the contrary, I had no responsibility to risk my life to support their actions. (Resulting consequences/ resulting benefits and drawbacks)

Lying is unethical, no matter what. (intrinsic value)

II. One day in 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the following happened: a Japanese soldier asked you the whereabouts of your friend, Ms. Chan. Chan was a member of the underground anti-Japanese movement, and you believed that this soldier was to capture and kill her. You knew that Chan was hiding out in Wanchai, and to keep her alive, you lied to that soldier and told him that Chan was hiding out in Fanling. You did not know that Chan had changed her plans and was in fact hiding out in Fanling. Because of your lie, Chan was caught and executed.

Is it unethical for you to lie in this case?

The reasons that lying is right:

I did not want Chan to be arrested, and Chan also had told me clearly that she was in Wanchai. My intention was correct. Therefore, there was nothing wrong that I lied. (the expression of human virtue/good intention)

This was an accident, and even if the results were not satisfactory, I did nothing wrong. (intrinsic value).

The reasons that lying is unethical:

I did not want Chan to be arrested. But whatever my intention was, Chan got arrested because of me, so I was wrong. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)

Lying is unethical, no matter what. (intrinsic value)







# New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies

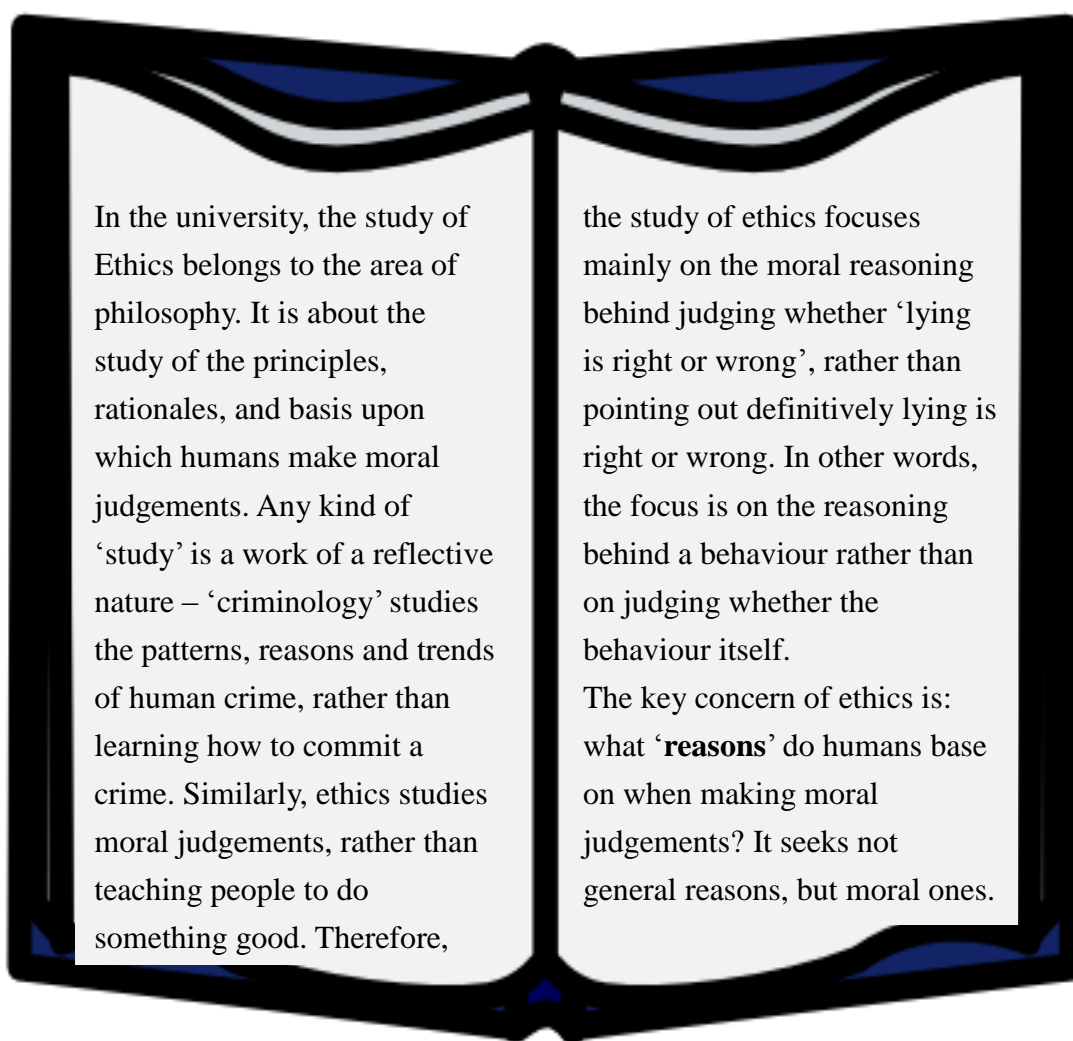
## Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials

### for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies

#### Lesson Two

### Thinking about ethics, learning to make judgements

#### Ethics



### What are general reasons?

General reasons can be:

Lying is unethical because pastors believe lying is unethical.

Lying is unethical because I do not want people to lie to me.

No society praises liars. If everyone says lying is unethical, we should follow suit.

I believe lying is not unethical, because others and I myself lie all the time.

### What are moral reasons?

From the perspective of ethics, moral reasons are those that people use to make moral judgements, for example:

(i) Lying is wrong in itself, therefore lying is unethical;

(ii) Lying leads to consequences that harm both yourself and others. Therefore lying is unethical;

(iii) Lying obscures the goodness of human nature and hides the truth. Therefore lying is unethical;

‘Intrinsic values’, ‘resulting consequences’, and ‘expressions of human virtue’ are moral reasons that ethics is concerned about. Studying ethical issues is to identify these reasons. Analysing ethical issues is to think and compare these reasons, so that we can make our judgements with moral reasons rather than general reasons. The term ‘moral judgements’ may seem formidable but if we understand the reasoning, it is a very approachable and interesting discipline.

Try remembering the two stories in the last lesson about the Japanese soldiers. Did you decide to lie? What reason(s) did you use to support or object to the behaviour of lying? Did you make considerations using ‘intrinsic values’, ‘resulting consequences’, or ‘expressions of human virtue’ arguments? If your answer is: “Yes!”, congratulations to you. You have begun to grasp the essence of ethics. These moral reasons are the basis for humans to make moral judgements. The Trolley Problem is a classic ethics studies exercise. Are you ready? Let us take a step forward in the journey of studying Ethics!

## The Trolley Problem

### Beginner's version



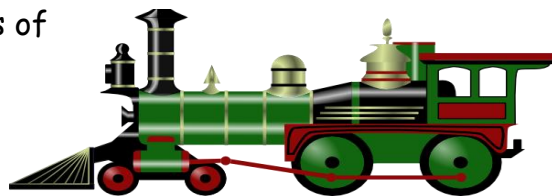
Assuming that you were a trolley driver. You are driving at 100km per hour. You have just made a turn when you see five workers working on the tracks in front of you. The brakes fail and the trolley is rushing ahead at full speed. You are panicking, knowing that if the cart keeps going, it will kill all five workers. You can, however, divert the car onto the abandoned side tracks ahead, where one worker is working. If you divert the car, this worker will be killed.



What will you do? Will you divert the trolley onto the side tracks? Why?

### Advanced version

Like the beginners version, you are facing the same critical situation. Only this time you are not the driver, but a passer-by. When the trolley loses control, you are standing on a footbridge across the track. This time, there is only one track with no side tracks. Five workers are working on the tracks, and the brakes on the trolley have failed. The trolley is going to hit the five workers. Just as you think you have chance to stop the tragedy, passer-by A who is curious about what is happening is coming. He is tall and strong and you know that if you push him off the footbridge, his body will fall onto the track, the trolley can be stopped. He will die, of course, but the lives of the five workers will be saved.



*Hauser, M.D. (2006). Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong. Ecco Press*

*\*Note: Stick to the details of the story. Don't change the story or otherwise the main points may not be conveyed.*

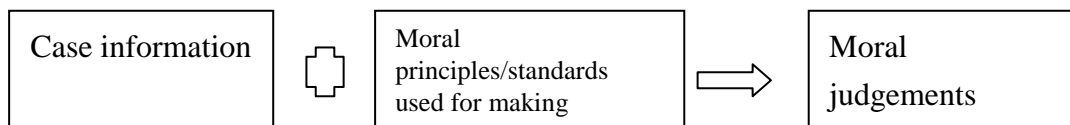
*For example, don't counter propose, "I will shout out loud to warn off the workers on the track".*

# Summary



Both trolley problems involve, simply speaking, sacrificing one person's life to save five people. In terms of consequence, both versions are the same. But would you find it difficult to make a decision in the advanced version? Why?

To make effective moral judgements, we need to understand and review:



- Facing the same scenario, we may adopt different moral principles and use different methods of analysis, provide different reasons, and make different judgements.
- Some people focus more on the consequence of an incident, and use the benefits or drawbacks as the criteria of judgement. If the consequence is good, then the action is good. If the consequence is bad, then the action is bad.
- Some focus more on the intention of the action as well as the rights and duties of a person. They make analysis according to whether the persons involved have fulfilled their duties or respected other's rights. If they have, then the action is good.
- Learning Ethics helps us understand the viewpoints of others, and how we can use the evidence on hand to deduce certain viewpoints through strict and organized methods.
- Conclusions cannot be drawn simply by looking at phenomena. The causes involved are complicated. We have to borrow the wisdom of ethicists to help us correctly analyse issues.

# Let's judge – Group discussion



The following are four cases. Form groups of 4-6 with your classmates, then choose one case and discuss the values involved. Try stating your stance, then make a moral judgement about the case – determine whether it is right or wrong.

## Case 1: Are price reductions wrong?



Two small grocery stores selling snacks and food stuff complained to the media that their prices for a certain brand of soft drink and instant noodles were 10% lower than that of chain supermarkets. One of the supermarket put pressure on the suppliers. The suppliers, in turn, requested the two stores to raise their prices to be in line with that of the supermarket. Otherwise, the supply will be stopped. As a result, one of the suppliers really stopped supplying to the small stores. Large chain supermarkets put pressure on the suppliers. The suppliers then stopped supplying goods to stores that sell goods at lower prices. Do you think the actions of the supermarkets are wrong?




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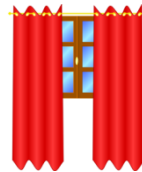
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## Case 2: Secret photography – justified?

A certain Hong Kong actor was secretly photographed and his nude pictures at home were subsequently published. The incident aroused social concern. Some believed that the government should make law against secret photography. Do you agree?




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**Case 3: Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) should not be abused to encourage laziness!**



Some have criticized that the welfare system of Hong Kong ‘encourages’ laziness. They believe that the CSSA discourages those people who are able to work to find jobs. This is unfair to taxpayers who are hard-working. This is why the rate of CSSA should be reduced to the minimal level or even cancelled. Do you agree?




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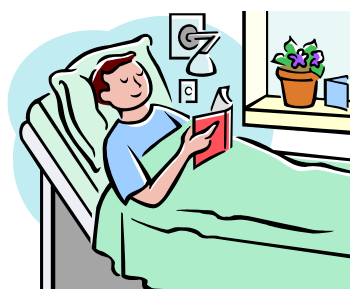
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**Case 4: He wants euthanasia**

Tang Siu Pun (Pun) hurt his back when rehearsing for the performance at the graduation ceremony. The accident led to paralysis below the neck. He was unable to speak and move. In 2003, he wrote to the Chief Executive Tung Chee Wah and the Legislative Council requesting “end his life in dignity”, i.e. legal euthanasia. Would you agree to Pun’s request?

*#Tang Siu Pun published a book I want euthanasia to share his experience in 2003. He passed away in December 2012 from illness.*




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Know a little more

### **Ethics and moral education**

Ethics is not moral education. Ethics focuses on the analysis of moral judgements, as well as the examination of ethical issues. It is the training of one's critical thinking. Moral education develops one's morals and provides inspirations for one to do good. Ethics asks: "What is moral?" Moral education asks: "How can we make a person more morally sound?" Ethics will ask, "Why define lying as unethical?" Moral education asks, "How can we keep one from lying?"

Therefore, learning about Ethics does not necessarily enhance moral qualities of students, but it would certainly help to enhance their analytical skills and abilities in making ethical deductions. Although ethics may not directly enhance moral qualities, it may have indirect effects. When students accept intellectually certain common principles of moral judgement, and have learnt that racial discrimination is unjust and unethical, even if they are emotionally used to racial discrimination, the discordance between intellect and emotion or action would create a kind of uncomfortable psychological pressure for them. One of the ways to deal with this pressure is to change their own attitudes so that they can be both emotionally and intellectually against racial discriminations.

## External activity: Personal reflection

Read the following case and consider which side to support. Try to offer reasons to support your choice.

**Which are more important, insects or people?**



### NEWS

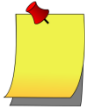
A certain real estate developer bought a piece of land beside a natural reserve at a high price. It applied to the Town Planning Board to develop a comprehensive residential project on the land. Representative of a local conservation group objected to the development of residences in the area. The reason was that there was a unique species of firefly which can only be found in Hong Kong. Developing the area would cause the firefly species to go extinct.

Different parties hold different values. They would make judgements on the basis of different reasons and would have different views about the same issue. The following are their views. Whose views do you prefer? Why?

Party A: the Town Planning Board should approve the project. The interests of humans certainly take priority over that of insects. The developer acquired the land through legal means and at a high price. They have sound reasons to develop the land and should not be intervened.

Party B: the Town Planning Board should not approve the project. Developing the project would lead to the extinction of the precious firefly species. Humans and other creatures should coexist on this earth. We have the moral obligation to conserve the fireflies. Environmental conservation should not make way for commercial interests.

## Reference material for Teachers (Lesson Two)



### Class objectives

- Ask the students to make a moral judgement in the face of moral dilemma, and explain their reasons.
- Faced with moral dilemma, we have to make judgements based on different moral principles. Where principles differ, conclusions would also differ.
- The moral principles students learn in ethics help them to analyse cases, clarify their thought, and identify the crux of a problem.
- Ethics helps students access the true nature of the issue without being blinded by superficial phenomena.

### I. The Trolley Problem

Basic version: What will you do? Which route will you choose? Will you divert the trolley onto the side tracks? Why?

Most students would choose to divert the trolley and run over the one worker. You may ask one of the students to explain his choice. Possible reasons may include:

- Sacrificing one person, as compared to sacrificing five persons, one should choose the lesser evil – sacrificing one person is less costly.
- Although running over one person is still murder, the motive of the driver is to save lives, not killing people.
- The one worker who was killed sacrificed himself to save five lives. It was an act of great benevolence. The society will be better off with more individuals like this.

The first point is based on the ethical principle of utilitarianism. That means the morality of an action is determined by the consequence brought about by that action.

If the consequence is overall beneficial, then it is good. If the consequence is overall harmful, then it is bad. Utilitarianism mainly sees the consequences of actions rather than its motives (like the second viewpoint) or the impact on other things (for example the impact on culture as in the third viewpoint).

If a few students chose to maintain the course and run over the five workers, you only need to reiterate the views.

Advanced version: You are not a train driver, but a passer-by. You are standing on a footbridge across the track. This time, there is only one pair of tracks with no side tracks. Five workers are working on the track, and the brakes on the trolley car have failed; the trolley is bound to hit the five workers. Just as you think you have no chance to stop the tragedy, passer-by A who is curious about what is happening is coming,. You know that if you push him off the bridge, so that his body falls onto the track, the trolley car can be stopped. He will die but the five workers will get to live.

What will you do? Will you push passer-by A off the footbridge? Why?

Most students would believe pushing passer-by A off the footbridge is wrong. You may ask students to explain their reasons. Possible reasons may include:

- Passer-by A has nothing to do with the incident, and he has no obligation to sacrifice himself.
- Passer-by A has no choice; he is not willing.
- In the first situation, the driver has little choice; he can only take the lesser of the two evils. At the very least, he is not committing murder. In the second situation, I am a passer-by and I have not obtained passer-by A's consent before pushing him over. It is a murder, which is morally unacceptable.
- As a passer-by, I have no right, obligation, or capacity to determine whether someone lives or dies.

According to the ethical principle of utilitarianism, the consequence of the latter case is the same as the first one – sacrificing one person to save five. The conclusion of the two scenarios should be the same. Yet students react differently. Ask students to explain.



Possible explanations:

The scopes involved in the two situations are different. Students may need to consider more when making the decision, i.e. considering more ethical principles (Theories are for teacher's reference only. They do not need to be mentioned to students)

- Passer-by A may be a great scientist/entrepreneur. His death may affect overall social wellbeing, causing lots of people to lose their jobs.
- Passer-by A has no choice; he is not willing.
- Actively killing someone is wrong in any situation. Even if killing someone will save more people, killing is wrong as it treats people as tools.
- I am also a passer-by. I have no right to make a choice for the workers or for passer-by A.

A few students may believe it is right to push passer-by A off the footbridge. The reasons may include:

- It is worthwhile to sacrifice one person to save five.
- Passer-by A has nothing to do with the incident. In the basic version, the worker on the side tracks also has nothing to do with the incident. The two situations are the same in essence.

Teachers may add the following assumptions to the case and ask students whether pushing passer-by A off the footbridge is right or wrong. This will help demonstrate the inadequacy of making moral judgements only by looking at superficial phenomena:

- You know that passer-by A has an incurable disease and has only one month left to live, so you push him off the footbridge to save others.
- You know that the accident was deliberately arranged by passer-by A. He is enjoying himself watching it happen.
- Passer-by A is the engineer for this trolley. It is because of a fault in his design that the accident has happened. This is why you push him off.
- You accidentally push passer-by A off and this happens to save five persons.
- Passer-by A decides to jump over on his own. He sacrifices himself in order to save others.
- Passer-by A is the engineer for this trolley. He knows it is because of a fault in

his design that the accident has happened, so he decides to atone for his mistake by jumping over and saving others.

#### Teacher's Conclusion

- Facing the same scenario, we may adopt different moral principles and use different methods of analysis, provide different reasons and make different conclusions.
- Some people (e.g. utilitarians) focus more on the consequences of an incident, and use the benefits or drawbacks as the criteria of judgement. If the consequence is good, the action is good.
- Some (e.g. deontologists) focus more on the intention of the action as well as the rights and duties of a person. They make analysis according to whether the persons involved have fulfilled their duties or respected others' rights. If they have, the action is ethical.
- Learning ethics helps us to understand viewpoints of others, and their induction processes that lead to these viewpoints.
- We often cannot only observe the phenomena in order to understand actions. The causes involved are complicated. We have to borrow the wisdom of ethicists to help us correctly analyse issues.

#### **Let me make judgements too – Group discussion**

##### ★Case 1: Are price reductions wrong?

Two small grocery stores selling snacks and food stuff complained to the media that their prices for a certain brand of soft drink and instant noodles were 10% lower than that of chain supermarkets. One of the supermarket put pressure on the suppliers. The suppliers, in turn, requested the two stores to raise their prices to be in line with that of the supermarket. Otherwise, the supply will be stopped. As a result, one of the suppliers really stopped supplying to the small stores.

Large chain supermarkets pressured the supplier. The suppliers then stopped supplying goods to stores that sell goods at lower prices. Do you think the actions of the supermarkets are wrong?

Reasons that the supermarkets are wrong: the large chain supermarkets use an unfair method to eliminate competition only to raise its own profit. It has neglected the interest of others, and so it is wrong. (intrinsic values)

Reasons that the supermarkets are right: Hong Kong is a free market that operates by the principle of survival of the fittest. The large chain supermarkets can use whatever means to compete. This is why it is right. Maintaining freedom of business brings the greatest benefits to the society. (resulting consequences)

★Case 2: Secret photography – justified?

A certain Hong Kong actor was secretly photographed and his nude pictures at home were subsequently published. The incident aroused widespread social concern. Some believed that the government should make law against secret photography. Do you agree?

Agree to making law against secret photography: Most secret photography is about the entertainment industry, and does not involve significant public interest. It does, however, invade the privacy of those being photographed. (intrinsic values)

Object to making law against secret photography: The media enjoys freedom of the press so as to monitor the society and the government. Making law against secret photography may limit media's ability to reveal other issues that involve public interest. If some media abuse this freedom, they can be punished in other ways. We should not eliminate one problem only to create another one. (intrinsic values)

★Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) should not be abused to encourage laziness!

Some have criticized that the welfare system of Hong Kong 'encourages' laziness. They believe that the CSSA encourages those unemployed people who are able to work to give up jobs. This is unfair to the taxpayers who are hard-working.. This is why the rate of CSSA should be reduced to the minimal level or even cancelled. Do you agree?

Reason for: If the government offers welfare measures that are too generous, people would prefer relying on the welfare provided by the government instead of working hard. The results are that a large number of lazy people would live solely on the welfare. This is unfair to other hard-working citizens and would impede Hong Kong's competitiveness. In addition, the Government is not financially equipped to deal with these individuals, and this is why the rate of CSSA should be reduced or cancelled. (resulting consequences)

Reasons against: the Government has the responsibility to care for all Hong Kong citizens and to make sure that everyone enjoys the same rights. The poor people are unable to improve their living and social status, so the Government has the responsibility to offer them more support. Current Government measures only serve to keep the poor alive but not change their fate, and thus are not sufficient. The suggestion to reduce or cancel CSSA rate is thus wrong. (intrinsic values)

Taking care of the weak, empathizing with those in difficulty, sharing with them possessions in a selfless spirit – these are all expressions of human virtue. The exercise of kindness is a display of human virtue. This is why we should offer welfare for the unemployed and should not cancel or reduce the rate of CSSA. (expressions of human virtue)

#### ★Case 4: He wants euthanasia

*Tang Siu Pun* (Pun) hurt his back when rehearsing for the performance at the graduation ceremony. The accident led to paralysis below the neck. He was unable to speak and move. In 2003, he wrote to then Chief Executive *Tung Chee Wah* and the Legislative Council requesting to “end his life in dignity”, i.e. legal euthanasia. Would you agree to Pun's request?

Reason for supporting Pun's request: a human being has absolute autonomy and ownership over his own life, including the right to decide his own death. (intrinsic values)

Reason for objecting to Pun's request: Humans should value life. Our right to life is not absolute. For example we do not have the right to determine our own time or way of death. Such rights reside with nature, or with God. This is why Pun has no rights to decide his own death. (intrinsic values)

Also, suicide is unfair to friends and family, and is only a display of human weakness. (expressions of human virtue)

## **Extended activity: Personal reflection**

### **Insects or people: which are more important?**

A certain real estate developer bought a piece of land beside a natural reserve at a high price. It applied to the Town Planning Board to develop a comprehensive residential project on the land. In the hearing, the representative of a certain local conservation group objected to the development of residences in the area. The reason was that a species of firefly unique to Hong Kong was found there. Developing the area would cause the firefly species to go extinct.

Party A: The Town Planning Board should approve the project. The interests of humans certainly take priority over that of insects. The developer acquired the land through legal means and at a high price. They have sound reasons to develop the land and should not be intervened. The view held by Party A focuses on the interests of humans. In terms of consequence, they believe that all things that benefit humans are right, even if it means sacrificing the environment. (resulting consequences)

Party B: The Town Planning Board should not approve the project. Developing the project would lead to the extinction of precious firefly species. Humans and other creatures should coexist on this earth. We have the moral obligation to conserve the fireflies. Environmental conservation should not make way for commercial interests. In Party B's view, the eco-system comes first. Nature is irreplaceable and bears intrinsic value. Humans have the obligation to conserve the nature even if it sometimes means sacrificing economic interests. (intrinsic values)

# New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies

## Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials

### for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies

#### Lesson Three

## Ethics – Learning to judge

When we face moral dilemmas, we may follow our own emotions, gut feelings or seek the views of others to make judgements. Other than that, we can also borrow from ethics theories and use them as thinking tools to help us clarify the issue and make independent and rational decisions. In this lesson we shall introduce some thinking tools from normative ethics. They are essential and basic knowledge for making moral judgements.



### Tool 1: Teleology

★Distinguish good from bad by the consequence of an action, whether it leads to benefit, drawbacks, good or bad consequence.

This school of theory advocates that an action, on its own, is neither good nor bad. The morality of the action is determined by the motive and the consequence. For example, lying itself is neither good nor bad. Its morality is determined by whether



one is lying to help and benefit others. Actions that benefit others are morally sound, and as such are good and ethical. In other words, 'good or evil' is the most fundamental concept for moral actions. An action is defined as morally sound, and thus right, because the action is 'good'; an action is defined as morally unsound, and thus wrong, because the action is 'evil'. The predominant theory in teleology is Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism specifies that: actions that bring the greatest 'good' to the largest number of people are right and morally sound. 'Good' can be replaced by 'wellbeing' or 'benefit', and thus actions that bring the greatest amount of wellbeing or benefit to the largest number of people are right and morally sound.

Supporters of teleology use 'good or evil' to determine the morality of an action. Good is right and morally sound; and evil is wrong and morally unsound. As to how good or evil is determined, a process of weighing is required. Since actions may not be 100% good or 100% evil, determination of good or evil involves weighing and calculating good and evil. If the good 'out-weighs' the evil, then the action is right and morally sound; if the evil 'out-weighs' the good, then the action is wrong and morally unsound.

Because of a need to weigh good against evil, gains against losses, benefits against drawbacks, good against bad, teleologists tend to determine the morality of an action by referring to its consequences. An action itself is neither right nor wrong. Whether it is ethical or not is determined by the expected result or the result. Murder in itself cannot be determined as unethical, because if we know that the motive is to protect one's nation from invasion or to bring about peace, then murder in this case is good, right and morally sound. Ethical actions become the 'means' to achieve an end.

**To conclude, determining the morality of an action by weighing good against evil is regarded as teleology.**

## Tool 2: Deontology

**★Determine the morality of an action based on its inherent nature, whether it is inherently right or wrong, good or evil.**

The key in deontology is 'inherent' and 'right or wrong'. By 'inherent', we mean that the right or wrong of an action is not affected by external factors. The consequence of an action cannot determine whether the action itself is right or wrong. Murder is unethical and wrong. It cannot be ethical although killing a tyrant can bring

well-being to the people. Similarly, an action cannot be ethical because of its noble intentions. Lying is wrong in itself. It cannot be a right or ethical action although the lie is told out of love or for the benefit of others. In other words, action is ends in itself. It is not a means that leads to values. The answer of deontology is absolute, not a result of negotiation.

Emmanuel Kant, who first proposed deontology, advocated that moral laws must be:

- (1) Objective or universal – meaning that morality is not affected by time or geographical location, i.e. one cannot say that murder is unethical today but acceptable in the ancient times; or that murder is wrong in China but right in western nations. Ethical standards must be applicable to any and all places.
- (2) Absolute – meaning that moral standards cannot be conditional, i.e. effective only under certain circumstances, such as with general public consent. Right or wrong is non-negotiable, and morality must not be compromised. If something is right, it is right despite what everyone else thinks!
- (3) Moral judgement should not be based on experience or information. Information only states facts, or benefits and drawbacks. Ethics deals with right or wrong, and is not related to personal or collective experience.
- (4) Intrinsic or self-regulatory – moral laws must be initiated by the intrinsic decision of an individual. It is a call for rationality, not to be dominated by outside authorities, trends or forces, or influenced by subjective emotion. Only then the moral subject can manifest through one's moral conscience, not to be hindered by personal emotion or outside threat.

Deontology focuses on the inherent rightness or wrongness of the action, and emphasises the unique meaning of morality. It does not confuse moral values with facts. If one employs ethical rationality to commit murder on one's volition, then one is in the wrong. The act of murder is inherently unethical. It is not limited by time, space, culture, or by consequence. There is no room for negotiation.



Deontology and teleology offer two ways through which one can provide ethical reasons to support one's moral judgements. In terms of the judgement made, there is no conflict between the two. Teleologist says murder is unethical because the result is evil. Deontologist believes murder is unethical because the act of murder is inherently wrong. In terms of reasoning, they take completely different direction. Conceptually they are incompatible and non-negotiable. It must be one or the other. Any integration must result in the sacrifice of one side of reasoning. We can say that murder is wrong but it is good, but why? If asked about the ethical reasons, we could only pick one of the above two.

### Tool 3: Theory of Virtue; Theory of Value

★What character qualities should a person ideally have? What values deserves our pursuit and preservation?

Theory of virtue is the oldest topic in the study of ethics. What counts as a morally sound person? Both Confucius and Plato examined what virtues a 'gentleman' (*junzi*, '君子' in Chinese) or a man of wisdom should possess. Theory of virtue asks what character and integrity should be found in an ideal person, or a person we respect or would model ourselves after. A morally sound person or moral sound behaviour will manifest and promote these noble character and integrity.

Benevolence, love, filial piety, kindness, honesty, bravery, righteousness, and loyalty are traditionally widely recognized virtues. They are the character that an ideal person should possess. Character is an internal quality of people. The actualization of character is behaviour. Filial piety is a human virtue. Taking care of one's parents is the actualization of the virtue. Virtues can be described to be the core substance of behaviour.

Virtues are embodied in people, realized through their behaviour. Values are qualities that humans pursue, affirm, and strive to preserve.

Humans have developed a diversity of academic disciplines that examine values. In economics we pursue efficiency; in aesthetics we pursue beauty; in religion and philosophy we pursue truths and meanings; in ethics we pursue the good. We can say that virtue is good in itself, and that right actions are good. Is there any implied meaning in the good? If we define the good as something we want to pursue or preserve, would your 'good' be different from mine?

The good that we pursue are all different: well-being, health, life, freedom, love, justice, heaven, peace, democracy, rule of law, stability, prosperity, happiness.... These are all values worth our pursuit. Once there is any clash between virtues or values, a choice must be made. Values that different people treasure can serve as a good starting point for discussion. Such kinds of debates may not always arrive at a consensus, but the thought and discussion processes may help people gain a deeper understanding about the concept of values and the behaviour they actualize.



## Think about it

***"Life is precious, but love is more highly valued. But for the sake of liberty, both can be sacrificed."***

***Do you agree? How would you rank life, love, and freedom?***

# Summary



Normative ethics provides a foundation for which people can discuss whether actions are right or wrong, and the importance of virtue and values. Base on this foundation, we will be able to answer some basic questions of normative ethics:

- (1) What are the reasons we adopt to judge an action to be moral or not?
- (2) What are the virtues an ideal person should possess?
- (3) What deserves our pursuit and preservation?

# Let's judge

**Try using the above tools of moral judgement to provide reasons for your analysis of the following cases, then make your judgement.**

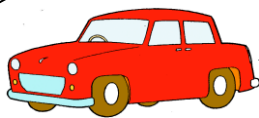
## *Crossroads: Automatic Teller Machine*

Wai was withdrawing cash at the automatic teller machine (ATM) of a bank when something unexpected happened. He had made a withdrawal of \$400 but the ATM machine dispensed \$4,000. He looked at the receipt; the listed amount was still \$400. Wai checked his account through online banking and found that only \$400 had been deducted from his account. He pocketed the money, thinking that the bank would soon discover the missing amount and ask him to return it. However, several weeks had passed and there was no call from the bank. Wai was eager to spend this lucky money on something he liked. He was much struggled. Should he return the money? Emotionally speaking, he wanted to keep it and it would be very troublesome to report to the police. However, morally speaking, he had a vague sense that spending the money is stealing.



Do you think Wai should return the money? Explain your moral judgements.

## *Twisting the baby's leg*



Your car crashes into a tree in a forest at a winter night. The car breaks down and your friends are badly injured. As it is midnight, there is no one on the road, so you run along it till you find an isolated house. An old woman and a baby live in the house. The baby is sleeping sweetly in the crib. There is no phone, but a car in the garage. You ask desperately to borrow it, and explain the situation to her. However, she doesn't believe you and is terrified by your desperation. She locks herself in the kitchen, leaving you alone with the baby. You knock on the door but she does not respond. You cannot find the car key. Then it occurs to you that she may change her mind and tell you where the car key is if you were to twist the baby's leg.

*(Adapted from: The View from Nowhere, by Thomas Nagel)*

Should you do it? Explain your moral judgement.

### *The choice between one and four*



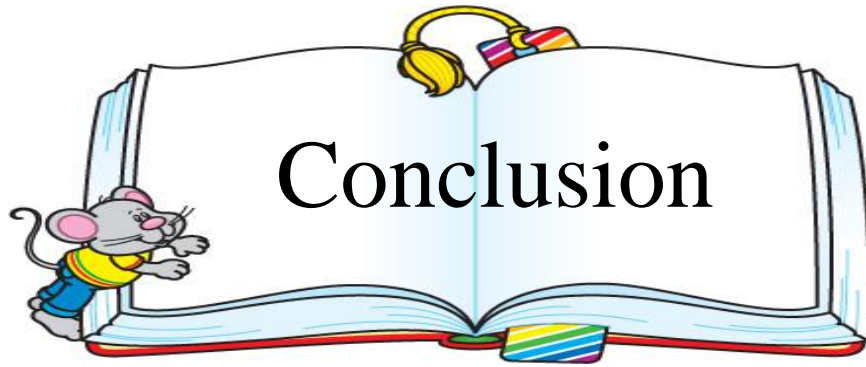
You are a doctor. There are four patients who are seriously hurt and sent to the hospital. Each needs a separate organ: a kidney, a liver, a heart, and so forth. You can save their lives if you remove a heart, a liver, kidneys, and so forth from a healthy person and distribute them to the four patients. At the same time, a healthy woman is in Room 418. She is in the hospital for routine check. From her test results, you know that she is perfectly healthy and her organs are suitable for the four patients. If you do nothing, of course, she will survive; the other patients will die. The other four patients can be saved only if the woman in Room 418 is cut up and her organs are distributed. In that case, to scarify one person can save four.



*(Adapted from The Nature of Morality, page 3-4, by Gilbert Harman)*

Should you do that? Explain your moral judgement.





After two-thousand years of work, scholars of ethics have quite thoroughly categorized and analysed the possible problems we may encounter daily. They have offered different tools and suggestions for our reference. Ethics is a discipline of study, allowing us to propose ethical reasons and make judgements through strict thinking processes and inferences. Students interested in ethics may read up on relevant literature, borrow from the wisdom of our forbearers, and understand the people and things around us from the angle of ethics to enrich our lives.





## Reference material for teachers (Lesson Three)



### Class objectives

- Show students that ethics includes many issues covering both personal and social aspects. These issues have been studied by many individuals. Learning ethics helps students grasp the focus and method of analysis of various issues, helping them develop their own viewpoints quickly and systematically.
- Introduce common thinking tools of ethics, i.e. utilitarianism, deontology and value theory.
- Demonstrate how these tools may help us effectively analyse various issues.
- Demonstrate how the mastery and application of these tools may help students in their studies of other subjects.
- Through dealing with two questions involving ethical dilemmas, show students how dilemmas can be resolved, i.e. through reflection, one should learn to uphold justice even if it means suffering losses. It is the shouldering of responsibilities that makes us human.

### Let's judge

#### *Crossroads: Automatic Teller Machine*

##### Reference answers and analysis

Wai was withdrawing cash at the automatic teller machine (ATM) of a bank when something unexpected happened. He had made a withdrawal of \$400 but the ATM machine dispensed \$4,000. He looked at the receipt, but the listed amount was still \$400. Wai checked his account through online banking and found that only \$400 had been deducted from his account. He pocketed the money, thinking that the bank would soon discover the missing amount and ask him to return it. However, several weeks had passed and there was no call from the bank. Wai was eager to spend this lucky money on something he liked. He was much struggled. Should he return the money? Emotionally speaking, he wanted to keep it and it would be very troublesome

to report to the police. However, morally speaking, he had a vague sense that spending the money is stealing.

Stance 1: List the reasons why Wai should return the money

- When Wai obtained the money by accident, he indeed had no intention of stealing. He did, however, deliberately covered up his actions afterwards. It is therefore unethical. (intrinsic value)
- On first look no one suffered any losses. However, if there was no one reported to the bank about the breakdown of the ATM machine, the bank would continue to suffer losses. As a result, it would consider lowering the daily withdrawal amount, or even reduce the number of ATM machines. Everyone would pay the price in the end. (resulting consequences/ resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- Although Wai appeared to have made some kind of ‘self-reflection’, he focused only on superficial gains and losses and did only selective thinking. It was not comprehensive or rational enough, and so he has neglected his own responsibilities. (resulting consequences/ resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- The various reasons Wai listed about why he should not report to the police could be summarized as ‘inconvenience’. At times of inconvenience we should strive even harder to keep to our principles, because this is when the value of these principles is truly shown. We should not compromise our principles just for convenience’s sake, and abandon our principles and our responsibilities. By keeping to our principles no matter the circumstance, we show the value and dignity of humanity. (the expression of human virtue/ good intentions)
- No matter how he tried to convince himself, the nature of Wai’s action was cheating. The action of Wai is against the value of honesty. (intrinsic value)

Stance 2: List the reasons why Wai should not return the money

- \$4,000 was a small amount to the bank. They earned huge profits and would not take the small amount seriously. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- Even if Wai did not take the extra money, someone else would. No one would report it, so why should Wai not take it? The result would be the same. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- The bank had not suffered losses in this case. The insurance company would compensate the bank.(resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- Wai was happy to have the extra money. No one has suffered any real losses. The

overall gains outweighed the losses. This is why it was good. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)

- Wai obtained the money out of luck. It was like winning the lottery. It was right to claim the prize and wrong not to do so. As a common saying has it: Every man for himself and the devil takes the hindmost. (intrinsic value)
- The bank should take responsibility for the malfunction of its own ATM. Wai was not deliberately cheating the bank, and should not pay the price for someone else's mistake. The bank should take responsibility for its oversight. (intrinsic value)
- The incident benefited the bank, as it would encourage them to improve the system. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)

### ***Twisting the baby's leg***

Your car crashes into a tree in a forest at a winter night. The car breaks down and your friends are badly injured. As it is midnight, there is no one on the road, so you run along it till you find an isolated house. An old woman and a baby live in the house. The baby is sleeping sweetly in the crib. There is no phone, but a car in the garage. You ask desperately to borrow it, and explain the situation to her. However, she doesn't believe you and is terrified by your desperation. She locks herself in the kitchen, leaving you alone with the baby. You knock on the door but she does not respond. You cannot find the car key. Then it occurs to you that she may change her mind and tell you where the car key is if you were to twist the baby's leg.

*(Adapted from: The View from Nowhere, by Thomas Nagel)*

Should you do it? Explain your moral judgement.

#### **Stance 1: Reasons for twisting the baby's leg**

- I would twist the baby's leg. Doing so would only make the baby suffer, and targeting the family of the old woman is the quickest and most effective way to achieve my aims. It is a necessary evil that benefits me and the badly injured passengers in the car. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- Harming the baby in order to protect the lives of friends will win the praises of most people. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- The old woman hides in the kitchen because she is terrified. If she recovers her wits afterwards, she will regret not lending her car to help the badly injured passengers. So by twisting the baby's leg I am actually helping her. (intrinsic

value)

#### Stance2: Reasons for not twisting the baby's leg

- Twisting the baby's leg would create the opposite effect. The old woman would even more terrified, and more reluctant to give her car key. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- It is an unethical act to twist the baby's leg to force the old woman. It violates their freedom and dignity, and is treating humans as if they are tools. No matter how urgent a situation is, one must not inflict illegal harm on another person. (intrinsic value)
- Human rights are a universal value. Harming a baby is an infringement of human rights. We cannot harm an innocent person just to achieve an aim. (intrinsic value)
- It is wrong to harm the baby. (the expression of human virtue/good intentions)

#### ***The choice between one and four***

You are a doctor. There are four patients who are seriously hurt and sent to the hospital. Each needs a separate organ: a kidney, a liver, a heart, and so forth. You can save their lives if you remove a heart, a liver, kidneys, and so forth from a healthy person and distribute them to the four patients. At the same time, a healthy woman is in Room 418. She is in the hospital for routine check. From her test results, you know that she is perfectly healthy and her organs are suitable for the four patients. If you do nothing, of course, she will survive; the other patients will die. The other four patients can be saved only if the woman in Room 418 is cut up and her organs are distributed. In that case, sacrifice one person can save four.

*(Adapted from The Nature of Morality, page 3-4, by Gilbert Harman)*

Should you do that? Explain your moral judgement.

Stance 1: It is right to distribute the organs of the healthy patient at room 418 to the four patients

- Comparing sacrificing one person to four, the cost of sacrificing one person is lower. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- Although killing one person counts as murder, the doctor's intention is to save lives rather than commit murder. (intrinsic value)
- The patient who was killed sacrificed herself to save four lives. This is an act of

great benevolence. The society will be better off with more people of this kind.  
(the expression of human virtue/good intentions)

Stance 2: It is wrong to distribute the organs of the healthy patient at room 418 to the four patients

- The patient at room 418 may be a great scientist/entrepreneur; her death will affect overall social well-being, causing a lot of people lose their jobs. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- If the doctor has the right to kill the patient, then people will lose faith in the medical system and society. This will create huge negative social impact. (resulting consequences/resulting benefits and drawbacks)
- The patient at room 418 is not related to other patients. She has no obligation to sacrifice herself. (intrinsic value)
- The patient at room 418 is not given a choice. She is not willing. (intrinsic value)
- By killing the patient at room 418, the doctor is committing murder. Murder itself is wrong (intrinsic value)
- As a doctor, I have no right, obligation and power to determine anyone's life or death. My obligation is to save lives. (intrinsic value)
- Doing so would violate my code of practice as a doctor. It will also damage the trustworthiness of other doctors. (the expression of human virtue/good intentions)




## New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies

### Introductory Learning and Teaching Materials

#### for the Secondary 3 Ethics Studies

#### **Appendix – Classic stories in introductory ethics**

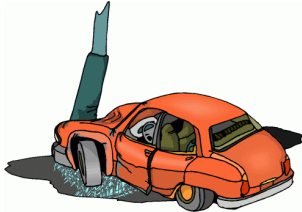


The interesting thing about ethics is that it helps students apply moral principles to deal with various personal and social issues or case. Through guiding students in their discussions of moral reasoning, teachers not only test students' understanding of theories, but also learn what kind of values students possess. Teachers can guide students to reflect on their personal values and pursuit of virtues, and review personal attitudes towards certain important values, such as human rights, justice, fraternity, and dignity.

The following cases are classic stories in introductory ethics. They are mostly fictional, but each contains certain important ethical issues or key concepts. Teachers may select materials from the appendix based on students' interest and abilities, which aims to help them understand the interesting aspects of ethics and have basic understanding of it.



## Organ transplant

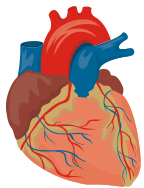


### ★Case 1★

You are a doctor in Accident and Emergency Department of a hospital when six victims in a traffic accident are brought in. All of them are severely injured but one is much worse off than the others. You do not have enough time to save all the six people. You can either save the five less seriously injured people or the most seriously injured person. Either way, patient(s) not getting urgent treatment will die.

What would you do? How would you choose? What are your reasons?

### ★Case 2★



You are a doctor. A family of five has just been submitted to the hospital. All are dying from serious injury and each is in need of an organ transplant. You know that there is a patient in the hospital who has been in a coma for years and is certified in a vegetative state. His blood type matches with those of the family members. His organs fit the needs of all the injured persons and are suitable for transplant. This coma patient has no family and would certainly die from having his organs removed. You can only save these five patients without the coma patient's consent; or you can choose to do nothing and let the five victims die.



What would you do? How would you choose? What are your reasons?



In the first case, most people would not hesitate to choose to save the five patients with less serious injuries. The reason is that the consequences are better. The doctor has no moral obligation to the patient who suffers more serious injuries. He has done nothing that leads to the death of the patient. The patient dies naturally. As compared to the first case, most people would find the second case more difficult to deal with. The moral judgements the doctor has to make involve more complex considerations. First, if the doctor decides to save the five persons, he must kill the patient in coma. Therefore, it is his action that directly leads to the death of the patient, rather than the patient dying naturally from lack of medical attention. Secondly, whose life is more important, the life of a coma patient or lives of five patients who are conscious? This is not a simple mathematical problem. It involves judgements about the value of life. Can we put a price on human life in the way we value things? Such act means devaluing human life. We are disrespecting people as human. Many would consider this morally unacceptable.

Similar to the patient in room 418 (described in Lesson 3), it is not the intention of the coma patient to sacrifice himself. Taking away his life, even if a coma patient is incapable of making his own decisions, will damage our confidence in the medical system, leading to a profound consequence

Suppose the coma patient has written a will while he was still conscious, specifying that his organs will be donated if they are needed, would the doctor still hesitate? Obviously he would hesitate less because it was a voluntary decision by the patient. A doctor would still be reluctant to perform such an operation because taking away a life obviously violates the values and code of practice of most doctors. Doctors are meant to save people, not to kill them. Even if patients make an active request, it is very difficult for a doctor who has moral standard to violate his own values and take away a patient's life.

For doctors, no matter what the scenario is: saving five and killing one; or letting the five die, both scenarios would weigh heavily on his conscience. So which scenario is better? This dilemma is hard to resolve. Different people from different backgrounds will make different moral judgements. So there is no model answer. If the doctor has already thought thoroughly about ethical issues of this kind, he would be able to make rational decisions instead of rushed ones. He would be able to keep his peace of mind and continues to work and save lives.



## She's drowning, but why should I care?



An ocean liner was sinking in the middle of the ocean. Some of the passengers got on the lifeboat in time and were waiting for rescue. Fai, who was the temporary captain of the boat, said, "We have 12 persons on this boat. It is quite desirable, as the boat can accommodate at most 20 persons and there is still enough space after stocking on food and water. See, we have enough food to support us until the rescue team comes. We shouldn't need to wait more than 24 hours before they come. So I think we can enjoy at leisure the extra chocolate biscuits, and each of us can share a sip of wine. Any objections?"

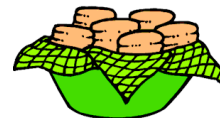


"It is certainly good to enjoy the extra biscuits," Ms Ma said, "But isn't it more urgent to rescue the poor drowning woman over there? She's been calling out to us for help for half an hour!" Some of the survivors dropped their heads and stared at their feet with shame; others shook their heads in doubt.

"I think that we already had a consensus," said Fai. "Her drowning isn't our fault. If we save her, then we cannot enjoy the extra biscuits. Why do we spoil our existing comforts?" The survivors on the boat murmured in agreement.

"We have the ability to save her. If we don't, she will die. Isn't this reason enough?"

"Life is cruel. I am not responsible for saving everyone who is drowning!" answered Fai. "Even if she died, it's none of our business. Anyone wants more chocolate biscuits?"



*Source: 'Lifeboat Earth' by Onora O'Neill, republished in World Hunger and Moral Obligation, edited by W. Aiken and H. La Follette (Prentice-Hall, 1977)*

She's drowning, but why should I care?



## Debriefing

From a global perspective, if we equate the lifeboat to rich western nations, then the drowning woman is the people from the poor regions who are dying of malnutrition and illness. From this perspective, the developed countries are just as indifferent as Fai. We all have sufficient food and medicine, but we rather enjoy our luxuries and let others die, unwilling to share our “extra biscuits” with others. If those on the lifeboat are unethical, we are no better.

Another analogy highlights such moral deficiency even more clearly: the lifeboat represents the entire earth. Some people refuse to share food to others on the boat. If it is cruel not to rescue another drowning person, it is even crueller to refuse to share the food to someone who is already on the boat.

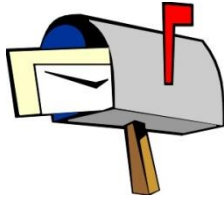
This image is highly stunning, and the message conveyed is equally shocking. But, are such analogies really valid? In the real world, food and other resources are not simply stored somewhere, waiting for distribution. Wealth is created and earned. Even if I refuse to share my surplus to others, it does not mean stealing other's resources. I am only keeping what originally belongs to me.

Nevertheless, even if we modify the analogy to reflect this reality, we still cannot claim to be completely innocent. Let us imagine that all food and supplies belong to those on the boat. Even so, once we are on the boat and find a drowning woman calling for help, can we still say, “Let her die, the biscuits are mine”? If there is sufficient food on the boat to share with this woman, to save her from death, we should rescue her and share with her the food and supplies that we own.

The United Nations recommends that developed countries should donate 0.7% of their Gross National Product for overseas aid purposes. No country, however, meets this recommendation. For most, donating 1% of their income to help the poor will have very little effect on their quality of life. The lifeboat analogy shows us that helping the poor will not make us good people; but if we do not, we are making a serious mistake.

## Who is the good kid?

Before Keung, Ming, Yan and Ling began their round-the-world trip, they each promised their mothers that they would write home regularly to inform them their location.



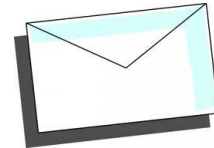
Keung wrote letters and gave them to someone else to mail. No one took his order seriously. Keung's mother ended up receiving no letters at all.

Ming wrote letters and mailed them himself. However, he either put them in abandoned postal boxes, or paid insufficient postal fee, or made other mistakes. None of those letters got to his mother.

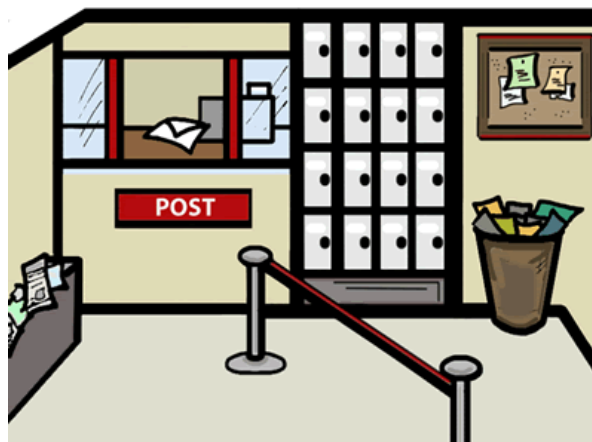
Yan wrote the letters and mailed them properly. However, the postal system let her down every time and Yan's mother never heard from her.

Ling wrote the letters and mailed them properly. She even called home to make sure the letters arrived. However, none of the letters arrived.

Among the four children, who have kept their promise to their mothers?



*Source: The moral philosophy of H. A. Prichard, as critiqued by Mary Warnock in What Philosophers Think, edited by J. Baggini and J. Stangroom (Continuum, 2003)*





## Debriefing

Who is the good kid?

This is a classic question in ethics! When can we say that we are free from the moral responsibilities placed on us? This question applies not only to writing to parents but also to nuclear disarmament.

The crucial debate lies in that if the expected outcome is not achieved after action, can we say that we have already completed our responsibility? Generally speaking, if the answer is negative, it would seem that the rules are too strict. Ling has done all she can to ensure that the letters arrived home. However, the letters did not arrive. If Ling has tried her best, how can we ask her to take responsibility for the failure? This is why we do not blame those who have tried their best for failure.

Nevertheless, this doesn't mean we forgive those who have not made their best efforts. Keung and Ming have neglected to fulfil their obligations. We can say with good reason that these two have not fulfilled their promises.

Yan's case is most interesting. On one hand, she could have done more to ensure the letter arrives home. On the other hand, she has done everything she should within our reasonable expectations.

Here, the concept of reasonable expectation is very important. If we are talking about nuclear disarmament, we should have higher expectation on the required inspections and additional measures. Based on the importance of the consequences, we are assigned different levels of expectation so as to ensure that the expected outcomes will indeed come true.

The issue of the letters touches upon one of the most fundamental issues of moral judgements: when making judgements one should not focus only on the motive or the consequence. If ethics care only about consequence, it would lead to absurd conclusions: even if Ling has done her best, so long as her actions fail to result in the desired consequence, she is still wrong. However, if ethics cares only about motives but not the consequence, it would result in another kind of absurdity: no one cares about the consequences of our actions. In this way, ethics will have no contribution at all to the well-being of people!

The various problems generated in mailing the letter might be trivial and insignificant, but the issues involved are not to be overlooked.

## It's just sharing - it's harmless!

"I succeeded!" Wah shouts. His computer has finally been connected to a new broadband network. In the past, he was used to using only dial-up internet. Now he can be online all day and enjoy fast browsing and downloading speeds. Best of all, it is all free.



It might be somewhat misleading to call it 'free'. Wah can enjoy free internet simply because he is using the wireless network (Wi-Fi) of his neighbour. Wi-Fi allows any computer within a limited area (as long as the computer is equipped with the correct software and hardware) to access the internet without subscribing to broadband service. Wah's home is close to that of his neighbour, which allows him to share his neighbour's Wi-Fi network.



Wah does not consider it stealing. Anyway, his neighbour will be able to use the internet, and he is just taking advantage of the excess bandwidth. Wah believes that this allows him to conveniently access the internet while doing no harm to his neighbour's interests. If it does not cause any inconvenience, where is the harm?



It's just sharing – it's harmless!



## Debriefing

Many people own laptop computers or palm digital devices that have Wi-Fi internet access. They would sometimes 'borrow' the bandwidth of others. They would use the Wi-Fi network of other companies or personal networks without informing them; it causes no harm on the performance of these networks in any way.

Wah's actions are more systematic. He uses his neighbour's Wi-Fi to access the internet every day. He enjoys what his neighbour pays for – this would seem quite unfair, but his actions do not bring negative impact to his neighbours. Whether or not Wah uses the internet, his neighbour would need to pay the same internet charges. His usage would not affect his neighbour. From this perspective, Wah appears less like a thief than a passer-by enjoying the shadow of a tree planted by his neighbour.

This example relates to the issue of 'taking advantage' of others. Those 'taking advantage' benefit from other's behaviour, but do not contribute anything. Sometimes, such acts of 'taking advantage' diminish overall benefits. In these occasions the drawbacks are apparent. However, sometimes, only the excess benefits are 'taken advantage of'. Nothing is taken away from anyone.

Such examples of 'taking advantage' are common. A community organises a fund raising concert in the park, and someone passes by and listens at the outer-most corner. No one is affected. However, when the collection box is passed to him, he donates not one cent.

If taking advantage is an act of crime, the damages caused by this criminal act are minimal. If so, what is wrong about 'taking advantage'? Perhaps, the key is not in individual cases in which advantage is taken, but the behaviour of 'taking advantage'. For example, we may not care about when someone uses our Wi-Fi network, given that under similar conditions we can use the Wi-Fi network of others. In Wah's example, he only takes but does not give. Wah has no plan to share his Wi-Fi network in the future with others in the same manner. His act of 'taking advantage' is not based upon a spirit of mutual benefit, so his action is intolerable. Also, his behaviour shows that he is extremely self-centred. However, although we find his action somewhat selfish, we cannot deny that the damage that he causes is not significant.

Fairness comes first - I don't care about anything else!



Wing and Ki are buying Christmas presents for their 3 children. The parents love their children, and try to treat them as equal as possible. This year, they plan to give each child an annual pass (regular membership) of a theme park, which costs \$600 per pass.

When they are ready to pay, Wing discovers a discount offer: if one buys two annual passes (gold membership) that worth \$900 per pass, he would get one annual pass (regular membership) for free. The gold pass holder can enjoy more special offers. Wing and Ki can get better goods for the same amount of money.



“We can’t do that,” says Ki. “This is unfair, because one child would be getting a worse present than those of the other two children.”

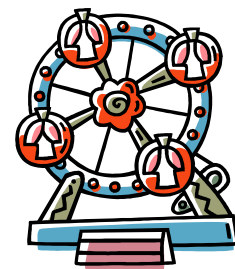
“But Ki,” says Wing, excited that two of his children can get presents in birthday months as well as free tours to the park during Halloween and Christmas, “How would this be unfair? They are not getting a present worse than the original one. Two of them will be getting an even better one. If we don’t join this offer, two children would be getting a gift worse off than the free offer.”

Ki says, “I hope they can have the same presents.”

Wing says, “Won’t it work even if some would get better presents?”

Ki says, “Fairness comes first – I don’t care about anything else!”

Wing says, “Is being fair means being equal?”



*Source: A Theory of Justice by John Rawls (Harvard University Press, 1971)*



Many believe we should pursue equality. But rarely would people think we should pursue equality at all costs, particularly the one-size-fits-all equality would lead to a distorted society. We can easily create equality for everyone. We simply need to make everyone as poor as the poorest people in society. However, this is obviously rather foolish because this would not improve anyone's life. The poorest are still as poor as ever, and others will be victims.

Although we agree that the one-size-fits-all equality does not work, it does not mean we should accept all kinds of inequality. We should ask under what situations inequality is acceptable. Wing explains to Ki why they should treat their children differently, and this is one answer: if it is harmless, and someone gains benefits, inequality is acceptable, as someone achieves greater happiness. Therefore fairness as a result of equality may take a lower priority.

This is very similar to the 'Difference Principle' as advocated by some political philosophers. The principle states that different treatments should be allowed only if it benefits the least advantaged. However, we are not sure if this principle can be applied to the 3 children. According to the original plan, the three children constitute a society with no hierarchy. Everyone enjoys the same wealth in this society. But the gold membership would surely make the two children richer, but the poverty of the remaining child would not be alleviated. Can we say that this plan is, overall speaking, beneficial?

Of course, applying the Difference Principle is on the social level would be very different from applying it on a family level. Socially speaking, Wing's argument is intuitively convincing. On family level, we have reason to give equality higher priority, as in small group, people are more inclined to feel inequality by comparison, thus leading to tensions.

Similar thinking can be applied to the political realm. One reason of opposing to inequality is that it has a negative effect on social harmony and on the self-esteem of the poor. Social psychologists point out that materially speaking, people may not become poorer because their neighbours have grown richer; but psychologically, they would suffer from negative emotions when there is a larger gap between their wealth and their neighbour's. Therefore, whether in the realm of politics or family, one should not simply consider fairness from a materialistic perspective.



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